

Leslie's Notes to a Non-Verbal Shrink

- 1 Bushwick Avenue - Bdwg; condy store; apartment house, Edward, Bernadette
- 2 P. S. 75 - Ms Pascouche, Ms Wuest, Mr. Yarker, snow, Robert, Marie
- 3 St. Barbara's School & Church: Betty, Sarina, choir, George
- 4 Bishop Mc Donnell: school plays, newspaper, nuns, Peggy, baseball
- 5 Hunter - Rona, ~~Arrow~~ Arrow, Adrienne, Milton, Bob Feinberg, Julie, Penny
- 6 Young working woman - NY sophisticate, plays, Writers Literary Agency, Brion, Pauline, ^{/ sep} travel, Mad Ave.
- 7 Peace Corps - Indey, Anabel, Mark, barrie, Mayn thing - book; Re Philypsons
- 8 CRV - AFS, Pam, Fanny, non-profits, CSS, Georgie, Juanita, Poling, coming out, CR
- 9 Expond Odyssey - add in Miami, transition to D.C.
- 10 D.C. - 21st St, WAWC, separations, Quest, WAFFCU
- 11 Liz - Cappy & Suzanne, Amy, David, Essl, ~~Map~~ power over, Stuckeys
- 12 Transition from Liz - Arlene, Mary, Lennie, Coleman, weight, operation

Sub-parts

1960 trip

1964 trip

the islands - Barbados, Jamaica, P.R.

theatre involuement

baseball / sports / the athlete

demonstrations - Black Panthers

Did I tell you that I was a twin? We're identical. I was pulled out of mother a few minutes before Larry. I was the stronger. For many years. Then Larry was stronger. But because I am a woman, I, of course, passed him. That just happened within the past year. I know he'll never catch up with me again. Men never do.

We grew up on a treeless street in Brooklyn, very ethnic, a wallless ghetto.

"Che dice?" asked Grandpa, but I never knew what to say. I wouldn't learn Italian because eyetalians were inferior. My mother named me Leslie because it sounded English. So maybe I could pass.

Larry and I were very close. Symbiotic. All the twins I've known had a sexual thing, an aura about them. More than incestuous. More like two parts of a whole, feeling alike, digging the same people, knowing each other so well, being each other.

Larry grooved on the Brooklyn Dodgers. He's got signed autographs by Preacher Roe, Pee Wee Reese and Roy Campanella. I interviewed Julius La Rosa and Bella Dodd in high school. Larry decided that since he predicted that Larry Branca would throw a home-run ball to Bobby Thompson in the 1951 Giant-Dodger playoffs that he would grow up to be the Dodger's greatest manager and show what a stupid oaf Charley Dressen was. I won an essay contest on "What Advertising Means To Me," so I was going to be chief copy writer for the largest ad agency on Madison Avenue.

~~Thanksgiving dinner.~~

Punch ball after school. Climbing fences. Ringalevio. Yanked out of tap dancing school because ~~the~~ our mothers found out that the instructors were gay. Sunday choir singing Gregorian chants. Reading three and four books a week instead of doing my homework.

Thanksgiving dinner.

"Leslie made the honor roll again."

"Smart-a, smart-a," said Grandma.

We're more interested in the pasta. And grandpa's homemade wine.

I sit, braided and starched, held up to scrutiny by the relatives, who are comparing their children, my cousins, with me. Larry sits uncomfortably in shirt and tie, desperate to be away, to explore the neighborhood, free of clothes, scraping along littered sidewalks in his roller skates, poking curiously in abandoned lots for untold treasures.

We're confined within the prison of childhood, unable to be real people, learning the deceptions that will fool the adults into believing we're the superficial robots they think we are. Ah, the secrets we hold. Larry chastised

for throwing a ball around the classroom and almost hitting an incoming teacher. Me sitting in the back row exploring Robert's genitals and he exploring mine. Being true hedonists as all children are, delighting in the sensual, the forbidden, enjoying every moment that is ours, held from adult view.

The Lone Ranger, Grand Central Station, the Shadow Knows, Just Plain Bill, Stella Dallas, Lux Radio Theatre. Saturday morning movies. Living in a fantasy world dominated by heroes and movie stars, entertaining visions of cattle ranges, flying down to Rio, getting all the newspaper scoops, catching the murderer, being superman.

"I'm going to be a private detective like Mickey Spillane," said Larry. "I'm going to be tough and have lots of girls and beat guys up, and carry two guns, one in my belt and one under my armpit and the underworld is going to be scared of me."

I said, "I'm going to be famous. Maybe I'll be a movie star or a great swimmer or write books everyone will read or rob banks. I'm going to change the world."

He got real excited over war movies. "I'm gonna beat all those bastards, carve 'em up, scare the shit out of them. I'll be a spy and trap all the traitors. I'll be a marine sargeant leading my men into the jungle to root out all the slant-eyes. I'll be a war-hero with lots of medals. I'll be a daredevil pilot, a fearless machine-gunner, the heavyweight champion of the world, World Series pitcher, riverboat gambler, first All-Star quarterback."

"I'm going to be famous," I said again. "I'm going to solve the world's problems so no one goes hungry. I'm going to be the first woman president and I'm going to rule for many, many years because everyone will want my benevolent, intelligent, just rule to continue. I will eliminate poverty and greed and hate because everyone will have an equal amount of everything, no one will covet her neighbors goods, and the Tower of Babel will be destroyed."

"You should teach," said my Mother to me. "Yes It pays good money and you have the summer off."

"Learn how to type," she said.

"Set your hair every night so you will be attractive to men," she said.

"Use eye makeup," she said.

"Don't beat the boys on the tennis court," she said. "Let them win, let them talk, let them feel superior. Otherwise you'll never get married."

Larry was a shy, hulking adolescent who fantasied all the time about girls. The first was Eleanore. We played "Prince and Rim Princess" when we were thirteen. She was well-developed. Her mother confided to me one day that "Eleanore is a woman now." I hadn't the foggiest idea what she was talking about. Only later did I understand that Eleanore had had her first period and was therefore fertile, which I guess her mother meant by Eleanore now being a woman. Me, I didn't know what the hell the blood was. I thought I had hurt myself playing and was afraid to tell my mother for fear I'd get punished for making a mess.

Eleanore was a true princess, arrogant, aware of her good looks, proud of her long, long curly hair, contemptuous of most of the "little boys" who hovered around her--she was going for bigger game. I'm sure she got what she wanted, probably a guy ten years her senior who was into making lots of money and giving Eleanore everything she wanted. So now they may have a 20-year mortgage on some sterile ranch house on Long Island, three kids, plastic furniture. Is that what Eleanore really wanted?

"I think about her a lot," Larry confided. "I fantasize about her picking me from all the others. I dream about the life we could have together. I think about her without any clothes on. Oh, how I want to reach out sometimes and put my hands through her beautiful hair, how I want to undress her, one piece of clothing at a time, slowly, and feel her all over. But we just go on playing childhood games and she treats me like a brother and I suffer quietly, waiting for her to smile at me, waiting for her to touch my hand, doing handstands to impress her, doing anything she asks so that I can be with her. Oh how I wish she would love me."

But she never did.

Then there was Freddy. He was about six years older than us, fat and ugly. He didn't waste any time being lovelorn and confining his fantasies within his head. Freddy was a doer. We'd play word games and when he'd beat me we'd go into the hallway and he'd feel me up or make me touch his prick. I sometimes lost on purpose because I wanted to understand these funny feelings I would have when he touched me. I knew I was doing something I shouldn't and I knew he was a pig, but being caressed down there turned me on. I didn't let him know that, though, and soon grew tired of his game. I could turn myself on, after all.

Larry came home with both knees badly bruised. Basketball. And more basketball. It was the passion then. I got my first lipstick...and my first bra. But I had no interest in dating. High school and its intrigues were what fascinated me.

Classes were mostly a bore. The fun was in extra-curric. We joined everything, the theatre group, the school paper, the yearbook, the track team, all good excuses for not having to sit in study class under the watchful eye of proctors. If you were part of an extra-curric group, you could escape to your group's nook in some far corner of the school. That's where we did most of our learning, too. Sitting in the cafeteria, around the layout tables in the newspaper office, in the hidden-away room where the costumes and props were kept, exchanging intimacies, boasting about the future, mouthing middle class values, unafraid. We were the pre-marijuana generation.

"I'm not going to college," said Evelyn. "I'll go to secretarial school and then get married so I won't have to work."

"I guess I'll be a teacher," Susan reported. "This way after I have my kids I'll have something to go back to, What about you, Leslie?"

"I'm not going to get married."

"Don't be so silly, the only girls who say that are afraid that nobody will ask to marry them so they say they're not going to get married to cover themselves."

True enough, I thought. But didn't say.

"What will you do if you don't get married?"

"I'm going to go to college and be a newspaper reporter and I won't have time for babies and housework and stuff."

"So then you'll be an old maid."

Horrible expression that. I wonder what male thought it up. Bachelor always sounded carefree, gay, joyous. Spinster and old maid made me think of lace turning yellow.

Of course I harbored my own thoughts about how I would get married. Very late in life, like around 30; I would already be famous, and so would he. We would be equals and no intrusions such as dirty toilet bowls, dirty dishes or dirty diapers were part of my projection. My marriage would be different.

However, I didn't spend a great deal of time on the subject, since I didn't date and barely knew any boys other than Larry.

Larry was on his way to be superstar athlete. All boys were Larry, supremely cool, supremely sexual, supremely sure of themselves/ and their superiority. Many times I wished I could be Larry. His choices were so much more free, yet whatever he might decide to do with his life would be supported by everyone, mother, dad, teachers, peers.

Most times I would just get smiles when I talked about what I was going to do.

Larry told me about his sexual conquests, though as far as I know he didn't tell anyone else. Larry was very honorable. He never made an enemy of any girl

he screwed. He was super-male, exuding confidence, brash yet tender, strong yet gentle, loving yet never totally giving of himself.

Virginity was still a big deal then, no good girl allowed herself to get screwed.

"Don't you let a boy touch you anywhere," my mother warned.

"Don't ever make the family ashamed by anything that you do," Daddy warned.

Which meant that any girl who got herself pregnant should probably kill herself so as not to bring disgrace on the family.

Nobody ever told Larry "don't."

There was Dianne, tall, slim, a blonde, hazel-eyed Italian. He'd sit behind her in class and play with her hair, devouring her white skin with his eyes, watching her walk into a room with a swing and a swish that Sophia Loren would have envied. She had a semi-tramp reputation, probably because she easily could pass for 18 and went out with older men to "fleshpots." We envied her and were afraid to understand the life she led. Long-legged beauty, holding tightly to Larry, wrapped around him, entwined, making it.

There was Laura, madonna-face surrounding imp eyes, healthy Italian nose, full, sensuous lips, throaty voice. It wasn't until years later that the Greenpoint origins in her speech destroyed ^{cut} ~~my~~ image of her. Then, Larry thought he loved her, he had her on a pedestal, for a long, long time he didn't touch her, she gave off an air of fragility but wasn't at all fragile, she wouldn't let him fuck her, not ever. Drove Larry crazy. He got close to all her friends, hoping that his proximity would gain him entrée, but to no avail. There was Mary Ellen, a very sophisticated know-it-all Irish girl who teased his ego but never came across, to my knowledge. There was bouncy Val, who did. There was the class politico, Tracy, who looked like Doris Day, but without the freckles. And I guess there were others but I have forgotten them.

For the senior prom my parents had to recruit a distant family cousin to take me. I got a lot of status out of that, because he was older and knew how to do things and I enjoyed myself on what was essentially my first date since he had the grace not to be condescending or look bored with us kids. Hated the dance since at that time I hadn't learned about my body and didn't move well, but I did enjoy the Village Barn (yeah, I really did) and the traditional Staten Island ferry ride and staying out all night. Such a grown-up thing to do. And breakfast at 7 a.m. Tremendous let-down the next day.

And then, commencement. There we were, we the naive, still groping children, ready to take on the whole world.

Poised, teetering, ~~ready to take on the whole world~~ going where?

I wondered what college was going to be like.

Was I going to take Larry with me there, too?

Was Larry going to continue to dominate me?

Was I going to share myself with Larry the rest of my life?

Would I ever be free of him and what he meant to me?

You see, I sort of told you a fib at the beginning of this story. I wasn't born a twin. I don't have a brother named Larry.

I am Larry. And I am Leslie.

Does that confuse you?

DEFEAT

Does one ever really want
Or is it pride
Or is it for the wanting
I should have cried?

When one has lost the prize
Are tears to fall?
Or was the prize worth having
Not at all?

Should one be solemn at the loss
Or is it wrong
Should one be gay with inner pain
And utter song?

If one must ne'er look back
Is it past
Or is it an imbedded print
In life's hardening cast.

They smile who win the prize
Are they the best?
Or is it luck, or God, or yet,
A futile test.

Leslie's Notes: On An Odyssey Without a Destination

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The champagne glasses, the lovely champagne glasses, and the liquor glasses, "Oh, will I ever taste Grand Marnier and Chartreuse again?" And the blender. And the electric can opener. I saved the spices, however. Must one also live without oregano, ground ginger and thyme?

And then the clothes, the coats, dresses, shoes, girdles, bras, stockings, the wools and the cottons and the orlons and the lacy things, "Can you use this coutoure hat? Would you like to have this pants suit from Bloomingdale's? How about these pretty scarves? This silk suit made in Hong Kong? These black silk slacks from Lord & Taylor's? A real leather purse from Altman's? "

And then the furnishings, the rugs, dressers, end tables, cabinets, mirrors, "Perhaps you can fit this cedar wardrobe in your apartment? I just replaced the foam in this den set, it's in very good condition. Those end tables are nearly forty years old, does that make them antiques? This is a very functional bedroom set, I always bought functional furniture. The runner needs shampooing but it's a good piece."

Because I am leaving New York in my jeans and army shirts and only carrying with me what will fit in my van.

Because no longer can I live the schizophrenic life , straight professional by day and revolutionary by night.

I am 35 years old with no place to go. Gauguin found Tahiti. What will I find? What, even, am I looking for? A place, a state of mind, a person, trees, escape, Shangrilah, where the revolution will ~~begin~~ begin?

I left New York on Election Day, apprehensive of this odyssey to nowhere, so scared of being alone and lonely, saying goodbye to what was known and comfortable and facing what was unknown, and a void, a blankness, the outside. New York, hated fun city, which had been everything to me, the all-night delis, Spanish/Chinese cuisine, philosophic cab drivers, the always psychedalic yet always monotonous trip that was the subway, the angry, the ethnic, thefreaks, the straights, the Queens housewives all together rubbing against one another, creating a friction and a tension that were sometimes unbearable and sometimes made beautiful things happen. But, finally, after 35 years, it got to me, the dirty streets, the garbage, the smell reached me first, then the bright lights and colors that I had always seen began to fade and grey, or gray, dominated my consciousness and I no longer saw the patches of green grass that had supported me in the past, I no longer got turned on by the one blue, cloudless day that poked through after an eternity of pollution, I no longer could take the daily pounding of rudeness, brusqueness, anger that characterized this most fierce battle of the survival of the fittest.

So I left, with one final heroic gesture, pulling down a lever in the voting booth for Bella, my farewell gesture to New York, and across town I went when, incongruously, smoke began pouring from my van, at 20th Street and Fourth Avenue, I couldn't even make it out of Manhattan, was this an omen? Turned out to be a torn hose, which cost me more time than money, but then I had lots of time, so I pointed north towards New England, staying within friendly havens, I was after all an east coast person who had felt absolutely lost and forsaken in Nevada and Utah, too much space, no guideposts to measure oneself by, too much open sky, so north I traveled, to Newport, Rhode Island, Boston, Mass., Cape Cod, Springfield, Mass., South Hamilton, Mass. Connecticut always left me cold, but Massachusetts was a favorite. I liked the Cape ~~at~~^{out} around Eastham, particularly the bay side, dunes giving way to the sea, the autumn there was exquisite, even in P'Town; Dennis, Harwich, their old houses, salt sprayed, but even the back roads that you take to avoid motel and motor congestion are being eyed by developers, it'll all be gone in a few years.

I liked, too, the non-summer charm of Ipswich, Gloucester, Rockport, the coastal pathway to Maine, where living is hardest, endurance-hardest fishing ports are bleak and fascinatingly forbidding, like Irish metaphysics. And Boston/Cambridge, Harvard's city-blocks of empty landscape mocking the South Side residents cramped in sun-blocked boxes, not understanding nor caring to understand sun rays on Massachusetts Avenue picking out intense student faces attached to bodies clinging to ivy, the ivy which will carry them forward to Achievement. In downtown Boston the Freedom Trail, remembrance of a time past when Boston was a revolutionary town. Never again.

Newport. The North Atlantic Fleet, reposing quietly, like a snake, subject to literary sniping attacks by activist friends who are very much a minority in this more rich than poor town. Castles abound, which would house whole extended families, but they are closed up, empty but for memories of wine goblets and bone china, occasionally inhabited by eccentric dowagers who never set foot outside. Two friends, both gay men, so many problems, so many hangups, me so newly come out worry if this is the way it is going to be. Up to South Hamilton, horsey set town, a struggle for radical minister and his even more radical, feminist wife, who must feed from within herself to move and change and deal with the power structure, since there are none, or, at best, very few, to struggle with. In Harwich with acquaintances from times past, playing football with their kids, exploring the National Seashore, the Cape at its ugliest and most beautiful, salt pond, marshes, low country. Allston, an all-women house, both gay and straight and fuzzy, ~~good conversation~~, seeing the soul-wrestling happening within women as they confront themselves and whatever relationships they have with men and recognize their oppression.

Getting turned on and not knowing how to verbalize, articulate feelings within this new society encompassed by gayness. Then to South Hadley, lesbian friend and her lover, who had two children. Good vibes, .22 rifle shooting at nearby dump, feeling strong, peer-in at Northampton Women's Center, portent of things to come. Revisit of Springfield, which I despise.

Straggled back down through New York, sheepishly, before pointing west. Whole different vortex of places to contemplate, Bethlehem, Pa., Reading, Wallingford, Pittsburgh. Shifting back and forth between past and present, old consciousness and new awareness, mid discarded life and undefined future, talking, brain picking, drawing out from women I may not have taken time to listen to before, finding out where they are, have been, why, what they're doing about what they know about themselves, weaving in and out among college friends, family, new gay friends, searching, seeing where am I in this maelstrom of experience, am I all or none of these, this ex-Peace Corps friend who believes that change is happening and is being accomplished with and by people constantly challenging the system a kick at a time, or by relatives who cling to lipstick, style, God and country as basic to life, or friend born out of ideological conflict who has moved even closer to me as I have moved further away—we would probably name the same values as most important to us even if our lifestyles and language are so far apart. Keep on truckin!, sister, through the flatlands, out to Youngstown Ohio, childhood friend, good liberal, where I was ten years ago, was uncomfortable about my clothes, didn't like the feeling. One good evening spent with the Polish mother of a New York friend, a warm, comfortable, evening in contrast to the brittle sophistication of the other household.

Cincinnati, some dreary midwestern city to most of the eastern establishment, but the place where the most intense love of my life resides. Surprisingly, the city has charm, steep hills and a river, ^{Mount} Mt. Adams, a Greenwich Village kind of atmosphere set high atop the city overlooking the river, Carney Street winding downward along the balustrade, Hatch Street, St. Gregory and Pavilion Streets, architectural madnasses sloping off into nowhere, little expensive shops, small buses of tourists examining the hippies, my friend encased in a photography studio. Our affair is over, has been for three months; she loves another, there is no future for the two of us yet I hold on to some last straw. The throaty sound of her voice, the smile, so rare, that lights up her eyes, the funny way she walks, how she ^{purses} ~~purrs~~ her lips, tortures that have kept me awake many a night. We had six weeks, six painful weeks with several moments of joy, worth it, of course. Feeling insignificant, not worth her love, feeling I must prove myself, do some spectacular thing to again engage her attention. I feel a loser, unable to

mobilize myself in a direction that will command respect, that will accomplish something, anything, that is worth accomplishing. After all, it was she who had helped-pushed-drove me to dispose of the champagne glasses and it is me who must decide what to do with me now that they are gone. Well, better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. We finally kissed--goodbye.

Daley's Chicago, where if one knows what happened in 1968 can never be a human city again. But the lakefront still confronts the ugliness and, on clear days, sometimes wins, as reflections from the water make the actualities less offensive. Good revolutionaries doing good revolutionary things, newsletters, storefronts, meetings, workshops, international days, libraries, appealing, but something is missing, I'm not there, I love them and support what they're doing, but I'm not there. From Chicago, however, comes the offer of a job--in Washington, D.C. I reject the idea immediately, I am barely ^{two} months into my odyssey, with many miles to travel, many places to see, many people to talk with, many ideas to deal with. But the thought of Washington grows on me, because I have heard there is a real women's movement there, a togetherness that has fragmented once but has within it the possibilities of coming together again. I am curious, so I decide to investigate. The job is movement, anti-war, ~~transitional~~, because most of me has begun the process that will transpose me firmly into the radical feminist camp, but my ideological mechanisms are slow and my head has to sometimes catch up to my gut, but I decide that I can be an upfront lesbian in Washington and be in a place where I know some women and maybe ⁱⁿ a place not so alien to my former life where I can confront myself and really begin to strip myself of those things analogous to champagne glasses which are not visible or concrete but which I know I still carry around with me. Class privilege, heterosexual privilege, all the fine young chauvinisms ~~isnt it~~ can easily be masked by jeans and army shirts but they hang in there and it's like wrestling with the devil to rid oneself of their influence, if it is ever possible to ~~do it~~ ^{have a complete} exorcism.

So I came to the nation's capital, and decided that here was the setting, here were the ideas, here was a state of mind, here were the women, here is where my feminist revolution would begin!

I went to a public grammar school so that Catholic junior high and high school didn't fuck me up too much, but I remember some things that made impressions on me, there was Francis Thompson's laudanum-produced poem that started, "I fled Him down the nights and down the days, I fled Him down the arches of the years," the rest is lost now and I am not fleeing nor have not fled from the God Thompson talks about but for many, many years I ran away from the affirmation, "I am a lesbian," so those lines often have popped into my head, we are always fleeing from ourselves but I thought I had stopped running.

Those first years when I fantasied myself as male lover, tortured sometimes but treasuring, savoring the fantasies, loving women, wanting only to be with women, instead going to parties ignoring the women, flirting with the men, talking with the men because they talked about politics and baseball and heroic things and the women talked about styles and furniture and babies and stuff like that. Once I was writing a play and ~~they~~ my friends knew I was writing a play and they asked me how it was coming and I said that most of the important scenes were written, I just had the love scenes left to write and they snickered. An astrologer once told me that my head would always rule over my heart, so I waited till I was 35 to affirm myself.

I guess to escape my fantasies I jumped into bed with a lot of men, and kept doing it because of course there was something wrong with me but if I spent enough mattress time with men maybe something magical would happen and all of a sudden I would begin to like it...and them. It didn't happen. So I stopped jumping into bed, I just pretended to the world that I did, I pretended for a lot of years, though once a year I did try again just for old times sake but that was a foolish thing to do, I should have known better, but you see I was still running.

I stopped running the first time for nearly two years when I had this beautiful thing with a Filipina, the Peace Corps would shit a brick they only were aware of all the pregnant volunteers, ^{it was} the first time for her and for me. There we were from, forgive the cliché, two different worlds, me the supposedly sophisticated New Yorker and she a peasant from a farming-fishing barrio, the lowest rung on the class totem pole and we loved each other and had to keep it secret because we were scared of our respective peer groups but I think her people knew and I think they approved, oh how I wished we could be open, but we did have some advantages we could walk down the road to market holding hands, and, you know, everybody knew the third grade teacher in our barrio school was a lesbian but nobody tried to get her fired she was a damn good teacher and a fine person nobody thought she was going to seduce their little girls. How painful it was to leave after two years but I couldn't stay it was not my culture I was an alien even though I was so happy there and felt at

Home, I must be my peasant grandparents daughter, and she could not come with me because cities frightened her New York would have destroyed her, once we were in Manila in a government building we took an elevator up to the third floor it wasn't until late that night that she told me how scared she was she had never been in an elevator before she did not know what an elevator was and when she stepped into it, this room and it moved, her heart stopped but she faced front like everybody else and saw that no one else was afraid so she wouldn't betray herself, she swallowed hard and pretended that she did it every day so I came home to New York very lonely.

And started running again. Dressing up to go out with men, flirting with my friends' husbands, they were more or less safe, negating what had been real, creating layers and layers around myself so no one would see, if I hid myself well enough no one would know not even myself, the months passed, the years, I met another woman just as I was getting into radical politics she was a conservative Republican and the schizophrenia I lived was intensified. That lasted a little more than a year, it was her first relationship with a woman, and then she decided she couldn't live the way we were living having to hide our feelings, our relationship from the world, she wanted to surface with a man, she wanted a husband, a baby, a house, respectability, society's blessing, not necessarily in that order, so while we continued to live together she dated men and I started climbing walls she got married and I nearly had a breakdown it drove me to see a shrink maybe I could deny my homosexuality with psychiatric help it didn't work he was a pig at \$35. an hour so I buried myself in politics.

And politics became the most important thing in my life. And the schizophrenia intensified, institutional professional by day, anti-imperialist radical by night, privileged heterosexual masking a vivid fantasy life. Marching, demonstrating, getting tear gassed, getting arrested, stapling newsletters, sitting in, shouting "pig", smoking dope, wearing buttons, writing rhetoric, linking arms against the silent majority, feeling strength in my commitment, applauding fire-bombing, right on brothers and sisters, up against the wall you motherfucking capitalist pigs.

But something was wrong. We fought side by side but we didn't take the time to know each ~~in~~ other, to listen to each other, to love each other. Our goal was revolution now but we were each struggling in a vacuum, not reaching each other, not touching each other, pushing ourselves toward the goal, toughening ourselves for the ultimate test, did you see Jon Voight in "The Revolutionary," were he moved himself along from campus thinker to bomb-throwing ~~revolutionary~~ terrorist? the end was martyrdom, our heroes the victims of the 11th Street townhouse, I am

more revolutionary than thou, my politics are more revolutionary than yours, we surrounded ourselves with our rhetoric and the intensity of our purpose, and fuck you, brother, fuck you sister, don't intrude on me, I am making a revolution so don't touch me, don't reach out your hand to me because I don't see it I don't want to see it.

It took almost two years within a women's CR group to rescue me, to turn me around, to peel off a few of those layers, to learn to stop rejecting my love for women.

I stopped running again. I affirmed myself. Confronted myself. Loved a woman openly. Proclaimed my sexuality aloud. Proclaimed sisterhood is powerful. Proclaimed I am a woman. Began the odyssey that, after many months of introspection led me to devote myself full-time to a feminist revolution, to working with women, for women. Beautiful.

But something strange is happening.

We are working side by side into the night and we are weaving cocoons around ourselves, creating vacuums, my politics is more feminist than your politics, if you're not a lesbian you are oppressing women, if you're not celibate you can't be a real revolutionary, if you allow yourself to become involved in an emotional relationship you can't be whole politically, if you're aggressive you're a butch, if you have ever drunk champagne and liked it you are middle class and therefore worth shit, if you make the mistake of falling in love you are undisciplined, untrustworthy, unfeminist, if you state needs that are not political you are unpolitical, if you dare to flirt, to be exuberant, to get stoned, to get smashed, we all have different ways to trip, if you dare, then prepare to suffer the consequences because those are weaknesses, weed, beer, pot, sex, we are, after all, Americans weaned on the puritan ethic. .

Must I remounce my sexuality once again?

Must I withdraw into myself once again it's self-protective, no matter that I've been fighting, struggling to strip off all those layers but instead I find myself building new ones, I don't want to start fleeing once more where would I go this time the country? a farm? an island? Maine?

Fuck you, SISTERS, if we can't get it together then let's go back to the bars, to men, to institutions, to the mainstream, buy our imported cheeses, our color TVs, and give up the myth we are living, give up the shit-kickers and army shirts and torn jeans and karate, stop sporting radical feminist doctrine cause we can't trust, we can't love, sisters, we are too fucked up, the next time we, you, I put somebody down, sister, the next time you, we, I deny our sexuality, sister, you, we, I have lost our revolution.

Leslie's Notes: More on Sexuality

(4)

Carly Simon's

~~Carly Simon's~~ "You're So Vain" seems to be on some dial on some radio somewhere, 'you walk into a party' she sings, I walk into a party with someone, with a group, alone, there are stares, yeah, so vain, women-watching, standing in a corner watching all the girls go by, did you hear that ~~she~~^{lesbie} no longer is sleeping with Doris, did you hear that Martha ^{and} Joanne are into a heavy marriage thing, did you hear that Lucy is fucking over Ann ^{by} seeing Connie, did you hear that Marion is with a different woman every night, what is happening with Sue did you hear that she's in and out of a relationship every two weeks, did you hear that their house is very incestuous, Phyllis told me that Reggie told her that Janet really digs you, did you hear that Dorothy still sleeps with men, what kind of lesbian is she, did you hear that Dany and Bert prostitute themselves, Mary says she's celibate but do you see the way she acts with Rita.. so I walk out of the party, heady with the buzz, buzz, buzz which travels over supersonic wires through our world, through our intense, microscopic world which we mistakenly take for the real world, and I grooved on it for four months until I said STOP, this is not the way to make a feminist revolution happen, there is too much energy, too much self being consumed by sex/love/ego, yes, love your sisters, love yourselves, but what about class, leadership, collectivity, power, we can't deal with these issues if our heads are in bedrooms, we can't, I can't keep my head working, my body primed and honed to receive ideas if it turns on to someone sexually, something is lost, I am less a functioning, self-disciplined political animal.

Many thousands of hours past were spent in workshops, conferences, rap groups, council meetings, talk, talk, talk, is it politically correct for us to do this, should we ally ourselves with them to do that and we struggled and sometimes I wasn't struggling because I was fantasizing about a woman it was before I came out and precious hours were lost, yes I know ~~wa~~ I was satisfying a need but those hours were lost because my self discipline wasn't strong enough to put them out of my head until I had the luxury of time to allow them in, sounds like the confessional when the priest asks you as an 8-year-old, have you had any bad thoughts and you ramble on about how you hated your mother and beat up the kid down the street, all in your head, and you said five our fathers and five hail marys and were absolved, but I had had a very rich fantasy life all through childhood ~~and~~ it was the way I survived as an only child and you can discipline your arms and legs and even your whole body with practice but it is very hard to discipline your conscious-subconscious, it is hard to subdue the pleasures of the daydream which offers ~~me~~ what could be our lives but never is.

So after many years of enforced celibacy and vivid fantasies I came out and got involved for six weeks, ^{stop} then eight months ^{stop}, then six weeks, two months, one week, no stops inbetween, hey whacha' doin', trying to make up for all those years? trying to come on as superstar sexually, politically, new girl in town free and ready to go, go go, what kind of fuckin' political animal are you? STOP!

No, I am not running again, for once I am facing up to my sexuality, my sexual identity and knowing that society, our society not theirs demands commitment, expects jealousy and possessiveness, looks with favor on the interminable misunderstandings, fuckups, hangups, groping, reaching, self-destructive thing we call love so often clothed in what is really ego gratification, so often what is really a woman need to fill a void because we haven't learned yet that the void can be filled in more positive self concept, we need to find all resources within ourselves, develop them, nurture them, cherish them, make ourselves strong, throw off our crutches, be able to stand alone, unafraid, and it is so hard but do it, be able to reason, to question, to to search, to change without dependence on a 'relationship', because we can't hope to find ourselves through another, we can't hope to become something leaning, sucking, grasping, pulling, taking, from another.

If we are strong, if we can dealw with ourselves, if we learn how to depend on ourselves, then maybe we can love... It's not so much celibacy as it is self-discipline, we can't deny our sexual needs they're there, fulfillment is a good, beautiful thing, masturbation is not enough, total denial may be political for female eunuchs but not for me, self-discipline, positive self-concept, that's where it's at.

LESLIE'S NOTES: ON AN ODYSSEY WITHOUT A DESTINATION

The champagne glasses, the lovely champagne glasses, and the liquer glasses, "Oh will I ever taste Grand Marnier and Chartreuse again?" And the blender. And the electric can opener. I saved the spices, however. Must one also live without oregano, ground ginger and thyme?

And then the clothes, the coats, dresses, shoes, girdles, bras, stockings, the wools and the cottons and the orlons and the lacy things, "Can you use this couture hat? Would you like to have this pants suit from Bloomingdale's? How about these pretty scarves? This silk suit made in Hong Kong? These black silk slacks from Lord & Taylor's? A real leather purse from Altman's?"

And then the furnishings, the rugs, dresser, end tables, cabinets, mirrors, "Perhaps you can fit this cedar wardrobe in your apartment? I just replaced the foam in this den set, it's in very good condition. Those end tables are nearly forty years old, does that make them antiques? This is a very functional bedroom set, I always bought functional furniture. The runner needs shampooing but it's a good piece."

Because I am leaving New York in my jeans and my army shirts and only carrying with me what will fit in my van.

Because no longer can I live the schizophrenic life, straight professional by day and revolutionary by night.

I am 35 years old with no place to go. Gauguin found Tahiti. What will I find? What, even, am I looking for? A place, a state of mind, a person, trees, escape, Shangrilah, where the revolution will begin?

I left New York on Election Day, November, 1971, apprehensive of this odyssey to nowhere, so scared of being alone and lonely, saying goodbye to what was known and comfortable and facing what was unknown, a void, a blankness, the outside. New York, hated fun city which had been everything to me, the all-night delis, Spanish/Chinese cuisine, philosophic cab drivers, the always psychedelic yet always monotonous trip that was the subway, the angry, the ethnic, the freaks, the straights, the Queens housewives all together rubbing against one another, creating a friction and a tension that were sometimes unbearable and sometimes made beautiful things happen. But, finally, after 35 years, it got to me, the dirty streets, the garbage, the smell reached me first, then the bright lights and colors that I had always seen began to fade and grey, or gray, dominated my consciousness and I no longer saw the patches of green grass that had supported me in the past, I no longer got turned on by the one blue, cloudless day that poked through after an eternity of pollution, I no longer could take the daily pounding of rudeness, brusqueness, anger that characterized this most fierce battle of the survival of the fittest.

So I left, with one final heroic gesture, pulling down a lever in the voting booth for Bella, my farewell gesture to New York, and across town I went when, incongruously, smoke began pouring from my van, at 20th Street and 4th Avenue, I couldn't even make it out of Manhattan, was this an omen?

Turned out to be a torn hose, which cost me more time than money, but then I had lots of time, so I pointed north towards New England, staying within friendly havens, I was after all an East Coast person who had felt absolutely lost and forsaken in Nevada and Utah, too much space, no guideposts to measure oneself by, too much open sky, so north I traveled, to Newport, Rhode Island, Boston, Mass., Cape Cod, Springfield, Mass., South Hamilton, Mass. Connecticut always left me cold, but Massachusetts was a favorite (I liked the Cape out around Eastham, particularly the bay side, dunes giving way to the sea, the autumn there was exquisite, even in P'town; Dennis, Harwich, their old houses, salt sprayed, but even the back roads that you take to avoid motel and motor congestion are being eyed by developers, it'll all be gone in a few years.

I liked, too, the non-summer charm of Ipswich, Gloucester, Rockport, the coastal pathway to Maine, where living is hardest, endurance-hard; fishing ports are bleak and fascinatingly forbidden, like Irish metaphysics. And Boston/Cambridge, Harvard's city-blocks of empty landscape mocking the South Side residents cramped in sun-blocked boxes, not understanding nor caring to understand sun rays on Massachusetts Avenue picking out intense student faces attached to bodies clinging to ivy, the ivy which will carry them forward to Achievement. In downtown Boston, the Freedom Trail, remembrance of a time past when Boston was a revolutionary town. Never again.

Newport. The North Atlantic Fleet, reposing quietly, like a snake, subject to literary sniping attacks by activist friends who are very much a minority in this more rich than poor town. Castles abound, which would house whole extended families, but they are closed up, empty but for memories of wine goblets and bone china, occasionally inhabited by eccentric dowagers who never set foot outside. Two friends, both gay men, so many problems, so many hangups, me so newly come out worry if this is the way it is going to be. Up to South Hamilton, horsey set town, a struggle for radical minister and his even more radical, feminist wife, who must feed fro within herself to move and change and deal with power structures, since there are none, or, at best, very few, to struggle with. In Harwich with acquaintances from times past, playing football with their kids, exploring the National Seashore, the Cape at its ugliest and most beautiful, salt pond, marshes, low country. Allston, an all-women house, both gay and straight--and fuzzy--seeing the soul-wrestling happening within women as they confront themselves and whatever relationships they have with men and recognize their oppression. Getting turned on and not knowing how to verbalize or articulate feelings within this new society encompassed by gayness. Then to South Hadley, lesbian friend and her lover, who has two children. Good vibes, .22 rifle shooting at a nearby dump, feeling strong, peer-in at Northhampton's Women's Center, portent of things to come. Revisit of Springfield, which I despise.

Straggled back down through New York, sheepishly, before pointing west. Whole different vortex of places to contemplate, Bethlehem, Pa., Reading, Wallingford, Pittsburgh. Shifting back and forth between past and present, old consciousness and new awareness, discarded past and undefined future, talking, brain picking, drawing out from women I may not have taken time to listen to before, finding out where they are, have been, why, what they're doing about what they know about themselves, weaving in and out among college friends, family, new gay friends, searching, seeing where I am in this maelstrom of experience, am I all or none of these, this ex-Peace Corps friend who believes that change is happening and is being accomplished with and by people constantly challenging the system a nick at a time, or by relatives who cling to lipstick, style, God and country as basic to life, or friend born out of ideological conflict who has moved even closer to me as I have moved further away--we would probably name the same values as most important to us even if our lifestyles and language are so far apart. Keep on truckin', sister, through the flatlands, out to Youngstown, Ohio, childhood friend, good liberal, where I was ten years ago, was uncomfortable about my clothes, didn't like the feeling. One good evening spent with the Polish mother of a New York friend, a warm, comfortable evening in contrast to the brittle sophistication of the other household.

Cincinnati, some dreary midwestern city to most of the eastern establishment, but the place where the most intense love of my life resided. Surprisingly, the city has charm, steep hills and a river, Mount Adams, a Greenwich Village kind of atmosphere set high atop the city overlooking the river, Carney Street winding downward along the balustrade, Hatch Street, St. Gregory and Pavilion Streets, architectural madnnesses sloping off into nowhere, little expensive shops, small buses of tourists examining the hippies, my friend encased in a photography studio. Our affair is over, has been for three months; she loves another, there is no future for the two of us yet I hold on to some last straw. The throaty sound of her voice, the smile, so rare, that lights up her eyes, the funny way she walks, how she purses her lips, tortures that have kept me awake many a night. We had six weeks, six painful weeks with several moments of joy, worth it, of course. Feeling insignificant, not worth her love, feeling I must prove myself, do some spectacular thing to again engage her attention. I feel a loser, unable to mobilize myself in a direction that will command respect, that will accomplish something, anything, that is worth accomplishing. After all, it was she who had helped--pushed--drove me to dispose of the champagne glasses and it is me who must decide what to do with me now that they are gone. Well, better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. We finally kissed--goodbye.

Daley's Chicago, where if one knows what happened in 1968 can never be a human city again. But the lakefront still confronts the ugliness and, on clear days, sometimes wins, as reflections from the water make the actualities less offensive. Good revolutionaries doing good revolutionary things, newsletters, storefronts, meetings, workshops, international days, libraries, appealing, but something is missing, I'm not there, I love them and support what they're doing, but I'm not there.

From Chicago, however, comes the offer of a job--in Washington, D.C. I reject the idea immediately, I am barely two months into my odyssey, with many miles to travel, many places to see, many people to talk with, many ideas to deal with. But the thought of Washington grows on me, because I have heard there is a real women's movement there, a togetherness that has fragmented once but has within it the possibilities of coming together again. I am curious, so I decide to investigate. The job is movement, anti-war--transitional--because most of me has begun the process that will transpose me firmly into the radical feminist camp, but my ideological mechanisms are slow and my head has to sometimes catch up to my gut, but I decide that I can be an upfront lesbian in Washington and be in a place where I can confront myself and really begin to strip myself of those things analogous to champagne glasses which are not visible or concrete but which I know I still carry around with me. Class privilege, heterosexual privilege, all the fine young chauvinism can easily be masked by jeans and army shirts but they hang in there and it's like wrestling with the devil to rid oneself of their influence, if it is ever possible to have a complete exorcism.

So I came to the nation's capital, and decided that here was the setting, here were the ideas, here was a state of mind, here were the women, here is where my feminist revolution would begin!